Dueling to the End/Ending "The Duel"

Girard *avec* Conrad

Nidesh Lawtoo

Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland

A philosopher who is warlike also challenges problems to a duel.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*

There!—there! Don't be so quick in flourishing the sword. It doesn't pay in the long run.

—The Doctor, quoted in Joseph Conrad, "The Duel"

René Girard's *Achever Clausewitz* is his latest, most incisive and penetrating account of the contagious dynamic of mimetic violence.[1] It is also a bold attempt to finish Carl von Clausewitz's classic *Vom Kriege* in a sense that is at least double.[2] On the one hand, Girard sets out to finish Clausewitz's insights into the dynamic of war understood as a duel by foregrounding mimetic principles the latter had intuited but not fully taken hold of. On the other hand, Girard engages in a theoretical confrontation with the Prussian officer with the aim not only to finish but also to finish off Clausewitz—this being the double-edged meaning of the French verb *achever*. This duplicity in the title informs the

Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture, Vol. 22, 2015, pp. 153–184. ISSN 1075-7201.

double investigation that serves as the driving telos of Girard's latest book. *Battling to the End* is, in fact, not only a theoretical account of war understood via the past-oriented model of the duel; it is also a theoretical duel on the very nature of future-oriented wars. And what this Janus-faced book reveals is that violence is predicated on a spiraling interplay of mimetic actions and reactions that, more than ever, threaten to escalate to extremes.

In what follows, I would like to follow up on this mimetic hypothesis by returning to a discipline at the origin of Girard's theory of mimesis (literary studies) to further the Girardian lesson that mimetic theories emerge from the literary texts themselves. In particular, I focus on a modernist writer who shares Girard's preoccupations with mimetic doubles, sacrificial violence, the escalation of wars, and, more generally, "the horror" of modernity: the British novelist Joseph Conrad. As I have shown in *The Phantom of the Ego*,[3] Conrad's most well-known tale, *Heart of Darkness,* is a key text for mimetic theory: it not only confirms the centrality of sacrificial mechanisms in the modern period but also foregrounds apocalyptic destinations made widely popular by Francis Ford Coppola's cinematic adaptation, *Apocalypse Now* (1979). In the process, the novella casts new light on the anthropological foundations of what Girard calls "scapegoat" mechanism, while at the same time revealing the "mimetology" responsible for what Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe calls "the horror of the West."[4] Along similar lines, William Johnsen also observed that "if Girard is right about human behavior (and great writers as fellow researchers) we ought to be able to both confirm and refine Girard's hypothesis about modern society in Conrad's work."[5] What follows confirms the centrality of Conrad for mimetic theory from a different perspective. I argue that a less-known tale, titled "The Duel," can help us "continue the work" (*BE* 2) Girard started in *Battling to the End* by both confirming and supplementing his mimetic hypothesis about the escalation of violence.

Published in 1908, "The Duel" is a historical fiction concerned with the Napoleonic Wars.[6] It deals with a historically documented relation between two officers in the Napoleonic army who fought a series of legendary duels; and these personal duels follow, shadowlike, the Napoleonic Wars that plagued Europe from 1803 to 1815. In this sense, this is a past-oriented story whose partial neglect stems from the reassuring feeling that it deals with historical ideals, revolutions, and conflicts we have long left behind. But Conrad's fictions, not unlike Girard's theories, tend to look in two opposed directions, both behind to what is past and ahead to what is yet to come.[7] This is equally true of "The Duel," a text that entails not only a timely

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

historical reflection on the "universal carnage" produced by past, total wars but also an untimely *theoretical* reflection on the escalating violence characteristic of our contemporary, global wars.

The innovative theoretical potential of "The Duel" emerges once it is put in perspective with both past and contemporary theories of war that have the duel as their paradigmatic starting point to think about the contagious logic of violence. On the one hand, Conrad's representation of the Napoleonic Wars as a duel directly echoes what is arguably still the most influential theoretical text on military strategy in the West: Carl von Clausewitz's *On War*. Conrad, in fact, considers the seemingly antiquated practice of the duel as a diagnostic mirror to reflect (on) the reciprocal dynamic responsible for what Clausewitz calls the "escalation" of violence. On the other hand, Conrad's emphasis on the mimetic nature of the duelists framed against the background of what he also calls "the Napoleonic episode as a school of violence" also looks ahead to a more recent account of war concerned with the contemporary escalation of violence.[8] As Girard reminds us in *Battling to the End*, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with their "Two world wars, the invention of the atomic bomb, several genocides and an imminent ecological disaster" (x), still deserve a good hearing for Clausewitz's realization that violence is reciprocal, contagious, and is thus bound to escalate to extremes. As we shall see, there are numerous continuities between Conrad's Napoleonic tale and Girard's most recent take on violence, unsurprisingly so since both Conrad and Girard take Clausewitz's definition of war as a duel as their starting points. And yet, if Girard focuses on an apocalyptic *battle to the end*, Conrad, while fully acknowledging this possibility, is primarily interested in the *end of the battle*. I argue that in this life-affirmative inversion of perspectives lies Conrad's theoretical originality.

Conrad, Clausewitz, Girard. As might be expected, bringing these three theorists of war together will not only lead to friendly handshakes and pats on the back. It might also generate a field of tension in which dissenting views and theoretical skirmishes can be played out, in a nonviolent mood. D'Hubert contra Feraud, Clausewitz contra Napoleon, Conrad contra Girard: indeed, this duel may turn out to be as fictional and historical as it is critical and theoretical. My wager is that in this doubling and redoubling of duels we shall not only hear the echoes of old historical battles but also the possibility for new theoretical beginnings.

Let this duel begin.

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

MIMETIC ANTIPODES: FROM *HOMO DUPLEX* TO *HOMO BELLICUS*

From the opening of the tale Conrad makes clear that his focus on the duel is at least double, in the sense that it is as personal and psychological as it is collective and historical. The first lines tightly join these two competing sides, suggesting that they are mirror images of each other. "The Duel" begins as follows:

> Napoleon I, whose career had the quality of a duel against the whole of Europe, disliked duelling between the officers of his army. The great military emperor was not a swashbuckler, and had little respect for tradition.
>
> Nevertheless, a story of duelling, which became a legend in the army, runs through the epic of imperial wars. (165).

That this is a "historical fiction" (x) is clear from the outset.[9] But this fiction is not simply historical in the sense that it is based on a real and somewhat absurd duel between two French officers in Napoleon's Grand Army; it is also historical in the more general sense that it reflects on what Conrad calls "the Spirit of the Epoch" (xi). The personal duel in the foreground is thus immediately situated against the larger historical context of the Napoleonic Wars in the background in a move that suggests a direct continuity between the intersubjective dynamic of the duel, on the one hand, and the collective dynamic of war, on the other. It is thus no accident that the protagonists' multiple duels—which move from France to Germany to Russia and back, from 1801 to 1816—parallel the rise and fall of the Napoleonic Wars. Clearly, the image of two "insane" (165) individuals dueling *usque ad finem* functions as a mirror that reflects Conrad's larger concerns with the violent dynamic responsible for what he calls, the "years of universal carnage" (165).

And yet, the opening lines also make clear that this *historical* fiction about the Napoleonic Wars is also a *theoretical* fiction on the nature of war tout court. In fact, Conrad immediately situates his narrative in a relation of theoretical continuity with a foundational text that also emerges from a careful account of the Napoleonic Wars. Written by a Prussian officer who partook in the wars against Napoleon, Clausewitz's *On War* provides an influential and so far unexplored, theoretical frame to reread Conrad's Napoleonic tale.[10] Conrad's opening lines clearly echo Clausewitz's beginning. As the latter famously puts it in chapter 1 of book 1, "On the Nature of War": "I shall not begin by expounding a pedantic, literary definition of war, but go straight to the heart of the matter, to the duel. War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale [*erweiterter Zweikampf*]" (13). The

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

connection between Conrad's "The Duel" and Clausewitz's *On War* could not be more direct: both authors focus on the Napoleonic Wars; both authors take the duel as a model to think about war; and, above all, both authors are interested in forms of escalating violence that go on *usque ad finem*.

Conrad's Napoleonic fiction is equally in line with a long tradition of narratives of the duel—from Pushkin's "The Shot" to Chekov's "The Duel," passing by Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*—whose concern is also to illuminate the obscure logic of violence, a logic that will continue to haunt Conrad's imagination in his last and less successful fictions, such as *Suspense* and *The Rover*. And yet, in "The Duel" Conrad's modernist lenses add a theoretical supplement to this romantic tradition that is at least double. First, Conrad's focus on two antagonistic characters that are clear antipodes dramatizes Clausewitz's definition of war in terms of a "continuous interaction with opposites" (*OW* 84). And second, Conrad makes us see the dynamic responsible for the *ongoing* and *escalating* dimension of the Napoleonic Wars in particular and of total wars in general.

That Armand D'Hubert and Gabriel Feraud—the two cavalry officers in question—are polar opposites is clear from the outset. The narrator describes them as follows: "two officers, one tall, with an interesting face and a moustache the colour of ripe corn [D'Hubert], the other, short and sturdy, with a hooked nose and a thick crop of black curly hair [Feraud]" (173). And their antithetical physical appearance functions as a reflection of their opposed psychological disposition: D'Hubert, we are told, is a "Northman" who was "born sober," Feraud a "Southerner" who was "born intoxicated" (176); the former is endowed with an "equable temper," the latter is characterized by "exuberance" (193); D'Hubert is defined by his "natural kindness" (167), Feraud possesses the "inferior faculties of a tiger" (180). North versus south, reason versus passion, mind versus body, culture versus instinct: the opposition could not be more clearly drawn. And not surprisingly so. This structural polarity is, in fact, not only personal; it also mirrors the wider collective interplay between rational and emotional forces that, for Clausewitz, in-*form* the logic of war itself: "Savage peoples are ruled by passion, civilized peoples by the mind" (*OW* 14), he writes in Book I. And in Book II, Clausewitz specifies: "Psychological forces exert a decisive influence on the elements involved in war" (73). "The Duel" is a careful diagnostic of the role of such antithetical, psychological forces in the articulation of the intersubjective and reciprocal dynamic of war qua duel. Conrad, in fact, dramatizes a personal polarity between reason and passion,

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

mind and body, to mirror the opposing forces that animate historical wars; and by doing so, he offers a theoretical account of the cold-blooded and hot-blooded principles of the art of war.

And yet, for Conrad the opposition between the duelists is not clear-cut, for an underlying mimetic continuity runs through these seemingly antithetical figures. D'Hubert and Feraud, in fact, fight on the same front, are both "officers of cavalry" (Hussars), and their similarities increase as the story unfolds. The narrative begins by calling attention to their "connection with the high-spirited but fanciful animal" (165) they ride, suggesting that the same "high-spirited" passion runs through these seemingly different cavalry officers. They are "both intensely warlike" (166) and obsessed with "the care of their honor" (194); they wear the same uniform, and, above all, their military careers lead them, step by step, through the same ranks: from lieutenant to captain, colonel to general. To be sure, these characters might be polar opposites, but like all opposites they attract each other in such a way that difference progressively gives way to sameness, opposed images turn out to be mirror images—antipodes become doppelgängers.

Conrad's fascination with the *homo duplex* is well known and traverses many of his fictions, but the connection between the *homo duplex* and the *homo bellicus* has so far gone unnoticed. Conrad, in fact, transgresses narrative conventions as he transposes the supernatural figure of the doppelgänger into a historical fiction to show that the psychic distinctions between self and other, rational and irrational characters, sane and insane men no longer hold as the antipodes are infected by the contagious pathos of war. The mimetic emphasis on a "shadow" (255) or "shadowy ghost" (246) at times reflected in a "looking-glass" (253) confirms that D'Hubert and Feraud are, indeed, mirror images of each other. Thus, as they face one another, they generate symmetrical inversions characteristic of mirroring reflections. More generally, if we take seriously Conrad's Clausewitzian intuition that the "private warfare" (192) of the duelists functions as a magnifying glass that mirrors the "universal carnage" generated by the public dynamic of warfare, then, at stake in this "Military Tale" are not only historical concerns with the past but also theoretical insights into the future. But to look ahead we first need to cast a retrospective glance at the mysterious origins of this duel.

MIMETIC ORIGINS: "THE HIDDEN REASON OF THINGS"

From the Author's Note onward, Conrad puts readers and critics on the search for the origins of the quarrel that started the duel in the first place.

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

We are told that there is a "universal curiosity as to the origin of their quarrel" (190), a "mystery surrounding this deadly quarrel" (202), and the narrative asks: "But what could it be?" (189). Such a mystery is indeed bound to prick critics' ears, offering them a hermeneutical riddle to resolve. But if this search for origins is already stimulated at the critical level, it is all the more relevant at the theoretical level. In fact, if Conrad joins arms with Clausewitz to cast light on the mysterious dynamic of war via the paradigmatic model of the duel, then, in these origins, lies perhaps the solution to the origins of mimetic violence.

"The Duel" opens up a number of possibilities to account for the prolonged outbreak of contagious violence it represents: from "a quarrel of long standing envenomed by time," to the "transmigration of souls," to the possibility that "there might have been some woman in the case" (190), the reader finds herself in a maze of hermeneutical options. What, then, could it be? In this context, a rivalrous, romantic affair seems a likely explanation, for reasons that are as literary as they are theoretical: Literary because, as Jeffrey Meyers points out, in fictions "most duels are provoked by the volatile stimulation of love";[11] theoretical because, as René Girard has convincingly shown in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, mimesis, desire, and rivalry are structurally linked. Let us recall that, for Girard, human desires are not original but imitative; "mimetic desire" is at the origin of a triangulation that can be summarized as follows: the subject desires what the model (or "mediator") desires, and since two different desires reach for the same object a violent conflict is bound to ensue, turning the admired model into a hated opponent (or "rival"). Ultimately, this ambivalence and the mimetic rivalry that ensues leads both antagonists to lose sight of the desired object as they are progressively caught up in the spiral of mimetic violence that renders them more and more alike (or "mimetic doubles").[12]

For these literary and theoretical reasons, then, "mimetic desire" as Girard understands it appears as a likely explanation for the origins of the violent quarrel between these two antagonistic figures qua doubles. A number of textual clues in "The Duel" seem to support this hypothesis. It is in fact during an armistice in Strasbourg, in the salon of Madame de Lionne, "a woman," we are told, "with a reputation for sensibility and elegance" (170), that the quarrel between D'Hubert and Feraud starts. And, indeed, the text alludes to a possible triangulation of desires when, upon realizing that Feraud is at the salon, D'Hubert exclaims: "'By thunder!' . . . 'The general goes there sometimes. If he happens to find the fellow making eyes at the lady, there will be the devil to pay!'" (170). Conversely, in a mirroring

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

move, Feraud addresses the potential rival in a tone that betrays his own personal jealousy, as he says: "'If you are thinking of displaying your airs and graces to-night in Madame de Lionne's *salon* you are very much mistaken'" (176). Indeed, Conrad plays with the Girardian hypothesis that at the origin of violence is a mimetic desire that converges toward the same "object," triggering a form of mimetic rivalry that opens up the infernal gates to what Girard calls "the royal road [*voie royale*] of violence."[13]

But if Conrad tampers with these gates he does not follow through them. In fact, numerous elements in the text suggest that the origins of the duel do not lie in mimetic desire. Madame de Lionne is the first to admit that "her personality could by no stretch of reckless gossip be connected with this affair" (190). Since this Madame speaks as a disappointed coquette who would have loved to be at the origin of such a legendary duel, the hurt pride of having her "personality" disconnected from this much-discussed "affair" has the ring of authenticity. Further, to convince readers that not even an unconscious desire is latently at work here, the narrator specifies that upon knowing that Feraud is at the salon, D'Hubert's "opinion of Madame de Lionne *went down* several degrees" (170; my emphasis), a clear indication that mimetic *desire* has failed to operate. And yet, this does not mean that *mimesis* itself, and the contagious emotions it generates, is not central to understanding the mysterious origins of the duel and, by extension, of war.

We should not forget that Feraud's and D'Hubert's first duel is itself a mimetic *reproduction* of yet another duel, which had taken place early that day, between Feraud and a civilian. There is thus a duel before *the* duel, an original arche-duel that generates "this private contest through the years of universal carnage" (165). Little is known about this mysterious origin, and the little we know is shrouded in a mist of highly subjective, unreliable memories. The narrative voice tells us that "Though he [Feraud] had no clear recollection how the quarrel had originated (it was begun in an establishment where beer and wine are drunk late at night), he had not the slightest doubt of being himself the outraged party" (172). A bar, drinks, and a violent quarrel: clearly this original scene fails to offer a reliable starting point to develop a genealogy of the origins of this mimetic "quarrel." Still, that this origin lacks objective, *historical* value does not mean that it is not revealing of subjective, *infective* principles constitutive of the logic of violent pathos. These diagnostic, genealogical principles can be schematically summarized as follows. First, this passage indicates that at the origin of D'Hubert and Feraud's first duel there is no mimetic desire, but mimesis

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

itself: this first duel is already a mimetic reproduction of yet another duel, in a movement of regress that does not point to a final, single origin. As the clinical figure of the Doctor later suggests, "the origin of the quarrel . . . went much farther back" (194). Such a claim makes the search for a final, mythical, and ultimately indemonstrable origin vain, yet the indication of an origin before the origin is revealing of a mimetic principle nonetheless. Namely, that a pathological reproduction of violent pathos automatically ensues once the motor of reciprocal violence is set in motion, generating a sequel of duels that go on *usque ad finem*. Second, the emphasis on "beer," "wine," and the kind of "establishments" that go along indicates that there is nothing rational about this dispute, no true, objective cause that would logically justify the quarrel but something that is of the order of irrational, contagious, and unconscious emotions. This scene, then, might not give us the true, objective logic of the duel's origin but, for Conrad, the lack of *logos* caused by an excess of pathos that takes possession of egos is precisely the mimetic principle of this violent pathology. Third, while Feraud is ready to risk his life in the duel, the reasons of the quarrel quickly fade from his memory. This suggests that the pathos of violence spreads contagiously, generating an unconscious dynamic that is cut loose from any conscious "reasons" that might have initially motivated it. And finally, the unshakable feeling "of being himself the outraged party," of being in the right while the other is in the wrong, is revealing of a generalized tendency to see the straw in the other's eyes but not the beam in one's own eyes. In sum, for Conrad—as for a long tradition in mimetic theory that goes from Plato to Nietzsche, Lacoue-Labarthe to Girard, and beyond—at the "origins" of violent conflicts there is not so much reason but unreason, no conscious actions but unconscious, mimetic reactions.

Now, if we return to dissect D'Hubert's and Feraud's first duel with these diagnostic principles in mind, we notice that Feraud reproduces the same irrational pathos as in the original quarrel. Yet this time, Conrad pitches this Southern (fiery) temperament against a Northern (cold) temperament to diagnose the affective and infective dynamic of the duel. Upon their return from Madame De Lionne's salon, Feraud, offended by D'Hubert's interference, challenges the latter to a duel—the second in a day. And here is how "sober" D'Hubert is pulled into the spiral of irrational violence that will last for nearly two decades. We are told that "At first he [D'Hubert] had been only vexed, and somewhat amused; but now his face got clouded. He was asking himself seriously how he could manage to get away" (176). And then Conrad, entering the contest via free indirect speech,

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

incisively adds: "It was impossible to run from a man with a sword" (176). Moving deftly from D'Hubert's exterior physiology to his interior psychology via a narrative lexis that is both diegetic in form and mimetic in content, Conrad traces the shift from the latter's ironic distance ("amused" face) to his worried realization of the force of pathos ("clouded" face), thereby revealing the difficulty *not* to respond to an attack of the other—no matter how irrational this attack is. Conrad is here dramatizing an intersubjective double bind that illustrates a general principle of war. Namely, that the duel is based on a reciprocal, mimetic bond whereby the action of the other generates a reaction in the self, binding the antagonists in a spiral of contagious and reciprocal violence. Thinking back to the duel, D'Hubert will later say: "'I had no option; I had no choice whatever, consistent with my dignity as a man and an officer'" (200). And the narrator confirms this point: "And Lieut. D'Hubert did follow. He could do nothing else" (178).

In the series of duels that follow, D'Hubert inevitably reproduces this absurd, pathological pattern; yet this pathos is not without logical explanation. On the contrary, it dramatizes a reciprocal, affective logic that perfectly captures Clausewitz's theoretical understanding of the art of war. In book 1 of *On War*, Clausewitz articulates the following principle:

> If one side uses force without compunction, undeterred by the bloodshed it involves, while the other side refrains, the first will gain the upper hand. That side will force the other to follow suit; each will drive its opponent toward extremes [*so steigern sich beide bis zum äußersten*], and the only limiting factors are the counterpoises inherent in war. (14)

Here we have, in a nutshell, what for Clausewitz, Conrad, and later Girard is the theoretical crux of the matter. Namely, that in the duel, as in war, violence cannot be thought in unilateral, linear terms. On the contrary, violence generates what Clausewitz calls a "reciprocal action [*Wechselwirkung*]" (15) that must be thought in *relational*, spiraling, or as Clausewitz puts it, "escalating" terms. This dynamic is thus not based on a subject-object billiard-ball causal relation; rather, as Clausewitz puts it, the subject's "will is directed at an animal object that *reacts*" (100), generating thus a "collision of two living forces" (16) whose "reciprocity" locks, *volens nolens*, the two opposed parties in a deadlock that leads the self to act like the other in a widening gyre of violence that leads "towards extremes." Hence, a violent, irrational attack generates an equally violent defense—no matter how rational the defender is—which, in turn, will continue to fuel the initial

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

attack. And once this interplay of attack and defense, action and reaction, is set in motion between duelists endowed with an equal force, a spiral of reciprocal violence generates an affective, contagious, and thus highly infective mimetic pathology. The duelists are thus not in control of violence; *it is the reciprocal logic of violence that controls them*. In sum, with its sequences of escalating duels between two mimetic doubles caught in the inescapable double bind of reciprocal actions and reactions, Conrad's "The Duel" is an admirable fictional representation of Clausewitz's theoretical insight into the reciprocal, escalating, and thus contagious logic of violence—what Clausewitz also calls "theoretical war" or, alternatively, "abstract war."

Now, this is the moment to recall the god Janus, who is presiding over this duel, and stress that Conrad is not only looking back to Clausewitz's account of abstract war derived from past, total wars; he is also looking ahead to recent theoretical developments in mimetic theory concerned with the catastrophes caused by our contemporary, global wars. In fact, by introducing two characters that mirror each other to reflect on the imitative logic of a type of violence that escalates to extremes, Conrad is anticipating René Girard's reconceptualization of mimetic violence as it is formulated in *Battling to the End*. A theoretical confrontation is thus essential to articulate Girard's contribution to Conrad studies, as well as Conrad's contribution to mimetic theory.

THE MIMETIC UNCONSCIOUS: MIRRORING ESCALATION

In his last book, René Girard turns to Clausewitz's definition of war as an "extended duel" to reframe the logic of mimetic violence that already preoccupied him at the beginning of his career. He does so by confronting the "escalating" dynamic of reciprocal violence that, for Clausewitz, is constitutive of abstract wars. Girard's interest in Clausewitz is thus more theoretical than historical, though his understanding of the contemporary historical moment informs his theoretical approach. For the French theorist, *On War* is an untimely treatise that should be reread today, for it offers an apocalyptic critique of the escalating logic of contemporary wars that cast a long shadow on our present and future.[14] But Girard does not simply offer a critical commentary of *On War*. Rather, in a thought-provoking gesture not deprived of theoretical violence, he argues that Clausewitz needs to be *achevé*.

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

To finish (off) Clausewitz, Girard stresses two related principles that are only latent in *On War* and need to be made fully manifest. First, Girard foregrounds the *mimetic* principle at work in Clausewitz's account of the reciprocal dimension of violence. As he points out: "Reciprocal action and the mimetic principle concern the same reality, even though Clausewitz, strangely, never spoke of imitation" (*BE* 10). And second, Girard takes literally Clausewitz's definition of "theoretical war," as well as the idea that through reciprocal action violence is bound to "escalate to extremes." For Clausewitz, in fact, "The 'trend to extremes' is indeed imaginable only 'theoretically,' in other words, when the adversaries are rigorously similar" (8), but this mimetic hypothesis, for Girard, should be taken as a real possibility. Mimesis is thus located at the center of Clausewitz's theory of war: first, the dynamic of the duel makes visible the mimetic principle responsible for the reciprocity of violence; and second, it is because of this reciprocal mimesis that violence is bound to escalate to extremes.

Girard does not mention Conrad's "The Duel," but given his career-long appreciation of the mimetic insights of great novelists, he probably would have been delighted to find in this tale a marvelous confirmation of his theory. In fact, by grounding his "Military Tale" on Clausewitz's definition of war as duel via the literary trope of the *homo duplex*, Conrad had manifestly dramatized the key mimetic principles Girard outlines. For Conrad, as we have seen, these Janus-faced characters reveal the fundamentally mimetic, reciprocal, and escalating dimension of violence, generating the "universal carnage" characteristic of total wars. And conversely, Conrad shows that this theoretical trend to extremes works only fictionally, in other words, when the adversaries are perfectly similar—that is, when they are doppelgängers. Well before Girard's innovative intervention in mimetic theory, Conrad, in a somewhat neglected tale, envisions the possibility to further Clausewitz's account of war by introducing a mimetic principle at the heart of his account of war qua duel. This does not mean that Conrad finishes off Clausewitz. Rather, Conrad supplements Clausewitz by exploring the principle of reciprocity in terms of a detailed, narrative-based account of behavioral mimesis that uncannily foreshadows Girard's key insights. But Conrad goes further. In fact, by zeroing in on the unconscious dimension of mimetic reciprocity of the duel, he also provides an empirical, psycho-physiological supplement to Girard's theoretical definition of reciprocity. Let us see how Conrad, on the shoulders of Clausewitz, furthers Girard's theoretical account.

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

There is, of course, nothing conscious or rational in D'Hubert's and Feraud's mimetic reciprocity that generates sameness where there once was difference, leading the defender to strike back in a gesture that mindlessly reproduces the violence of the attacker. Clausewitz, for one, had already specified that "even the most educated of peoples [*gebildetsten Völker*] . . . can be fired with passionate hatred of each other" (*OW* 14; translation modified). And Girard corroborates this view, as he says that "passions do indeed rule the world, and the revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars released them" (*BE* 9). Man is not a rational animal but a mimetic animal. Granted. This is, after all, an old story that goes back to the origins of mimetic theory in Plato's thought. What is new is that Conrad contributes to this mimetic tradition by offering an incisive diagnostic of the unconscious principles informing the emergence of violence. Upon hearing D'Hubert's initial refusal to fight, Feraud quips:

> "Ah, you won't?" hissed the Gascon. "I suppose you prefer to be made infamous. Do you hear what I say? . . . Infamous! Infamous! Infamous!" he shrieked, rising and falling on his toes and getting very red in the face. Lieut. D'Hubert, on the contrary, became very pale at the sound of the unsavoury word for a moment, *then flushed pink to the roots of his fair hair*. (177; my emphasis)

These are comic narrative exchanges that reflect a tragic psychological lesson: once caught up in the logic of the duel, an irrational character "red in the face" manages to affect the other, rational and originally "pale" character, in such a way that he also "flushed pink," generating sameness at the heart of difference. This passage reveals the immanent, psycho-physiological principle responsible for turning these antipodes into remarkably similar characters. Put differently, the similarities between the two duelists qua doubles are an unconscious *symptom*, not a *cause* of the contagious dimension of violent emotions. The duelists do not fight because they are doubles; they become doubles because they fight.

Conrad shows a remarkable awareness that emotions are contagious and transgress the boundary that divides self and other(s) generating a mimetic form of unconscious communication that is not under the control of consciousness and is, in this sense, *un*-conscious. Preceding the so-called Freudian "discovery," Conrad's account of the unconscious is not based on a repressive hypothesis that has dreams as its *via regia*; nor does it entail a triangular, and still Oedipal, account of desire. Rather, it is based on the immanent, diagnostic insight that human beings respond involuntarily to the affects of others, reproducing gestures and emotions that are proper to

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

the other within the ego itself. The realization that humans automatically reproduce expressions of others was untimely in the modernist period, but it is now supported by recent empirical investigations in the contemporary period. The discovery of "mirror neurons," in particular, offers an empirical account of the importance of imitation in intersubjective relations concerning monkeys and humans alike that is currently opening up a productive dialogue between mimesis and science. Mirror neurons, we are told, "fire" in the brain not only when we perform a gesture but also when we see others performing gestures. As Vittorio Gallese explains in his contribution to *Mimesis and Science*, "When perceiving others expressing emotions by means of their facial mimicry, the observer's facial muscles activate in a congruent manner, with intensity proportional to their emphatic nature."[15] These are now well-known, revolutionary discoveries. They not only encourage us to rethink the foundations of subjectivity in relational terms but also give us new insights into phenomena such as sympathy, emotional contagion, identification, and nonverbal forms of communication that are central to understanding self-other relations. Less known, however, is that these are actually revolutionary *confirmations* of mimetic principles modernist writers have been describing all along. As I have argued in *The Phantom of the Ego*, modernists from Nietzsche to Tarde, Lawrence to Bataille contribute to making our understanding of the psyche new on the basis of a model of the "mimetic unconscious" that has precisely such psycho-somatic reflexes as its main door. Immersed in the same modernist tradition, Conrad helps us further this line of inquiry by investigating the role of unconscious mimesis outside the confines of the lab, in a complex, real-life, sociopolitical scenario (such as war) in which one's survival literally depends on the way mirror neurons unconsciously fire—or misfire. The mimetic unconscious, for Conrad, is thus already a political unconscious in the sense that it is a relational, intersubjective, and thus social unconscious.

Well before the discovery of mirror neurons, Conrad shows a fundamental awareness that the mimetic similarities between the two duelists are a psycho-physiological *effect* of the human tendency to unconsciously reproduce in the gestures of the other, especially if this gesture is imbued with emotional pathos. Girard had already implicitly alluded to this point as he says that "Violent imitation . . . *makes adversaries more and more alike*" (*BE* 10). Conrad specifies this diagnostic by revealing *the unconscious, mirroring principles that make adversaries alike*. What Conrad shows, in fact, is that these characters do not fight because they are similar,

or have similar desires that converge on the same object. Rather, *they fight because their nervous system unconsciously responds to the contagious pathos of violence*. Such a mimetic principle can be summarized as follows: an external, psycho-physiological manifestation of an emotion (or pathos) in the other generates an automatic, mirroring reflex in the self triggered by the all-too-human tendency to involuntarily mirror people (or mimetic unconscious). This unconscious reflex, in turn, generates an affective flow of nonverbal communication that blurs the boundaries that divide self and others (or individuation). The violent emotion present in the self is thus triggered in the other as well, catching the antipode in a double bind that turns him into a mimetic double (or *homo duplex*)—no matter how rational, temperate, and self-controlled this other is or may want to be. Thus, the "pale" Northerner's mirror neurons are triggered by the violent expressions of his Southern counterpart and unconsciously fire, infecting him with the same pathology he had previously diagnosed as "madness." The mirroring dynamic of the duel itself turns difference into sameness, antipodes into doubles. In an untimely theoretical gesture, Conrad puts the old fictional trope of the doppelgänger to new theoretical use to make us see the mimetic principles that lead individuals and nations to fire—at the sight of others firing.

From the very beginning of the tale, Conrad represents Clausewitz's account of war as a duel via the principle of an unconscious mimesis that turns polar opposites into mirror images of each other. The perfectly balanced mirroring structure of the duel, and the reciprocity that ensues, allows Conrad to dramatize the escalation to extremes, which, for Clausewitz, we should not forget, is possible *only in theory*. Conrad, then, gives fictional, empirical, and affective life to an abstract theoretical principle to reload what I call "mimetic patho(-)logy" in the context of war.[16] The escalation to extremes, for him, ensues when the two adversaries are perfectly equal and immediately strike back, triggered by the mirroring reflex of the mimetic unconscious that generates symmetrical reactions. Thus, whether the officers fight with swords or sabers, on foot or horseback, their actions are perfectly balanced and reciprocal insofar as these modes of combat require immediate, unreflective, automatic reactions that are only bound to escalate if two duelists qua doubles face and confront each other. For instance, in the third duel, fought in Silesia with a cavalry saber, we are told:

> If not fought to a finish, it was, at any rate, fought to a standstill . . . . Both had many cuts which bled profusely. Both refused to have the combat stopped, time after time,

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

> with what appeared the most deadly animosity. This appearance was caused on the part of Captain D'Hubert by a rational desire to be done once for all with this worry; on the part of Captain Feraud by a tremendous exaltation of his pugnacious instincts and the incitement of wounded vanity. At last, disheveled, their shirts in rags, covered with gore and hardly able to stand, they were led away forcibly by their marveling and horrified seconds. (204)

This is a revealing passage not only for *what* it says but also for *how* it says it. The symmetrical opposition of the duelists is accentuated by Conrad's symmetrical sentence structure, a chiastic structure that reflects the mimetic principle responsible for turning opposed figures into mirror figures. Captain D'Hubert's "rational desire" has, in fact, its mirroring counterpart in Captain Feraud's "pugnacious instinct." That desire tends to be instinctual and pugnaciousness can be rationally planned indicates an underlying continuity that hides behind the first layer of straightforward opposition. Mimesis, in other words, cuts through the boundary that divides reason from unreason, conscious action and unconscious reaction. As the narrative suggests, it is this mirroring effect that brings their "homicidal austerity" to the extreme: "Asked whether the quarrel was settled this time, they gave it out as their conviction that it was a difference which could only be settled by one of the parties remaining lifeless on the ground" (205). For Conrad, then, as for Clausewitz before him and Girard after him, the mirroring escalation of violence leads to a battle *usque ad finem*. And what he makes us see is that violence continues to escalate to extremes for two mimetic reasons: first, because the two adversaries are mirror images of each other; and second, because the duels they fight call for unconscious mimetic reactions.

Rereading Conrad's "The Duel" in the company of both Clausewitz and Girard, and with the tradition of the mimetic unconscious in mind, reveals that this much-neglected historical fiction articulates a timely theoretical account of the origins of contagious forms of violence, both at the interpersonal and collective level. As Conrad puts it in another Napoleonic tale, "Poets do get close to truth somehow—there is no denying that."[17] What we must add now is that if Girard attempts to "finish (off)" Clausewitz, Conrad continues to supplement Girard's apocalyptic insights into the escalating logic of mimetic violence and the catastrophic ending that derives from it. "The Duel," in fact, accelerates the reciprocal action of abstract war only to *suspend* it at the end. Consequently, "The Duel" does not end with a battle to the end but with the *end of the battle*—which does not mean that the two antipodes will be easily reconciled.

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

THE *PHARMAKON* OF *MIMĒSIS*: THEORETICAL SKIRMISHES

We have seen that Girard's reading of Clausewitz's account of theoretical war resonates strikingly with Conrad's diagnostic of a duel that escalates to extremes. Conrad dramatizes a mimetic escalation of violence that reveals underlying psycho-physiological principles responsible not only for the violence of two individuals but also for the collective violence that animates what he calls "the years of universal carnage" (165). This mimetic hypothesis is internal to both Clausewitz's and Girard's accounts of war and should not be lightly dismissed, especially in an age of globalized violence on the rise such as ours. Writing in the aftermath of two world wars, the threat of nuclear escalation, international terrorism, climate change, infectious pandemics, and other impending global catastrophes, Girard warns us: "we have to have the lucidity to say that humanity itself tends towards annihilation" (*BE* 19). This is a lesson we shall have to keep in mind, especially since Girard is no longer alone in ringing alarm bells; such claims find an echo in a number of influential theorists of the end times—from environmental criticism, to political theory, to continental philosophy.

And yet, it is precisely at such precarious and vulnerable historical times that we should be careful not to fall prey to apocalyptic despair, taking the imminent possibility concerning the likely destruction of the planet as an inevitable destiny to which we shall fatalistically succumb. There are a number of reasons to resist this conclusion. Girard, it should be noticed, does hermeneutical violence to *On War* by positing the primacy of "theoretical war" over "real war," the "escalation to extremes" over the striving for "peace" (*BE* 19). The "possibility of an end of Europe, the Western world and the world as a whole" (ix) is in line with the apocalyptic bent that drives Girard's own thought.[18] But in following a "religious interpretation" (xii) of a secular text such as *On War,* Girard distorts Clausewitz's immanent, and a-theological approach. Girard complains that "no one seems to read" (xiii) Clausewitz but it is sufficient to read attentively chapter 1 of book 1, titled "What Is War?" (the only chapter Clausewitz himself "regard[ed] as finished" [*OW* 9]) to find out that the Prussian officer considers the possibility of the escalation to extremes as an "abstraction" (17) that does not match the reality of real war. As Clausewitz puts it, this possibility is "nothing but a play of the imagination [*Spiel der Vorstellungen*] issuing from an almost invisible sequence of logical subtleties" (16). And he adds: "the human mind is unlikely to consent to being ruled by such a logical fantasy [*Träumerei*]" (17). Writing in a

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

pragmatic, realistic mood characteristic of a man who has experienced war firsthand, he specifies: "the very nature of war impedes the *simultaneous concentration of all forces*" (19; Clausewitz's emphasis). For Clausewitz, then, there is no straight, ascending path that leads to an apocalyptic escalation to extremes. Once an abstract, ideal plan is put into practice, there are number of down-to-earth "frictions" (65) that shift war from the perfect symmetry of conceptual designs to the uneven roughness of the battlefield, from "abstract war" to "real war." Consequently, for Clausewitz at least, "the world of reality takes over from the world of abstract thought; material calculations take the place of hypothetical extremes" (18). And as he hammers the point home throughout the book, he insists that "*actual war is often far removed from the pure concept postulated by the theory* [der Krieg in der Wirklichkeit sich von seinem ursprünglichen Begriff oft sehr weit entfernt]" (33; Clausewitz's emphasis). Thus, he concludes his diagnostic by saying that theory's "purpose is to demonstrate what war is in practice, not what its ideal nature ought to be" (240). Indeed, for anyone who has read *On War* it should be clear that for Clausewitz the practice is far removed from the ideal model.[19] Clausewitz and Girard share fundamental assumptions about the reciprocal dynamic of war in abstract *theory*. But when it comes to the fundamental ontology that in-*forms* their takes on *reality*, their approaches differ: one is an empirical, a-theological officer who is ultimately concerned with the material basis of "real war"; the other is an idealist, theological theorist who is fascinated by the apocalyptic potential of "theoretical war." No wonder that despite their mimetic affinities, Girard does theoretical violence to Clausewitz and tries to finish him off to prophesize that "the apocalypse has begun" (*BE* 210).

Now what about Conrad? We have seen that "The Duel" entails a fictional confirmation of Girard's mimetic hypothesis that invites us to take seriously the danger of escalations of violence. But important differences need to be signaled too. When it comes to the driving telos of Conrad's historical and theoretical narrative, he is much closer to Clausewitz's pragmatism than to Girard's idealism, to the former's desire for peace than to the latter's vision of apocalyptic war. Conrad was not much of a duelist in real life. But as we now turn to see, he has a warlike, fictional side too—in the sense that "he challenges problems to a duel."[20] In addition to the personal duel that mirrors the historical wars, a third, theoretical duel, somewhat twice removed from the fictional and historical origins, is now added to this scene of mimetic contestation.

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

There is in fact a sense in which Girard, not unlike Feraud, is intensely warlike, is on the side of Napoleon, and privileges the hypothesis of an escalation to extremes over and against more peaceful, diplomatic solutions. Conrad, on the other hand, is clearly on the side of D'Hubert, a much more complex, dynamic, and plastic character endowed with a psychological sensibility, strategic faculties, and desire for peace that is present in Clausewitz but is missing in the Napoleonic Feraud. If he envisions the possibility of putting an end to the duel, it is thus on the basis of a strategy aligned with D'Hubert: a figure nicknamed "The Strategist," for "he could think in the presence of the enemy" (251). Thus, if he reveals the mimetic dimension of the escalation of violence characteristic of *abstract war*, he, Conrad, also strategically sides with Clausewitz so as to consider a theoretical solution to the problem of violence in the context of *real war*. Contrary to Girard's claim that violence "always wins" (xvii) in the end, Conrad's narrative telos is driven by Clausewitz's realization that "Not every war needs to be fought until one side collapses" (*OW* 33), and that "with the conclusion of peace the purpose of the war has been achieved and its business is at an end" (32). Hence, the Strategist must find a way out from the mimetic escalation of violence. Rather than following "the royal road of violence," we shall thus follow Clausewitz's strategic attempt to open up what he calls "a short cut [*naher Weg*] on the road to peace" (35). This is how Conrad finishes—without finishing off—Girard.

What, then, is Conrad's strategic solution to put an end to the duel? Clearly, in light of a representation of a romantic duel animated by an unconscious pathos that lasts through "the years of universal carnage," he does not offer a reassuring return to the *logos* of enlightened and diplomatic reason as the diagnostic solution to the poison of irrational violence. The whole narrative functions as an illustration that rationality repeatedly fails to contain the unconscious pathology of mimetic escalation. Conrad's solution will thus not be an idealist or a rationalist one; nor shall it be Christian or theological.[21] Rather, in an immanent, a-theological move that is constitutive of the imitation of the modernists, Conrad will seek a solution to the riddle of mimetic violence in the problem itself: namely, in the human, all-too-human tendency to imitate.

Aware that there is no outside of mimesis, Conrad seeks in the contagious pathology a possible patho-*logical* solution to the problem of mimetic escalation. This diagnostic point is still in line with the Girardian realization that mimesis is at least two-faced, depending on whether it

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

operates in absolute war or real war. Prompted by Benoît Chantre, Girard agrees that "reciprocal action *simultaneously provokes and suspends* the escalation to extremes. This is indeed one of the consequences of imitation, namely to have these two opposite effects" (*BE* 11). And a bit later Girard specifies:

> It is therefore true that reciprocal action both *provokes and suspends* the trend to extremes. It provokes it when both adversaries behave in the same way, and *respond immediately* by each modeling his tactics, strategy and policy on those of the other. By contrast, if each is speculating on the intentions of the other, advancing, withdrawing, hesitating, taking into account time, space, fog, fatigue and all the constant interactions that define real war, reciprocal action then suspends the trend to extremes. (13)

This is a life-affirming move that nuances Girard's apocalyptic account of abstract war by opening up a possible mimetic way out from the cycle of reciprocal violence on the basis of a consideration of real war. Clausewitz, in book 3, had indeed devoted a full chapter to "The Suspension of Action in War," and the idea that in real war the frictions "suspend" war is in line with Clausewitz's thought. And yet, the theoretical origins of this ambivalent double movement in which mimesis is seen to function as both the poison and the remedy do not lie in Clausewitz. Instead they can be traced back to another intellectual figure that, while not explicitly acknowledged, looms large in the mimetic economy of Girard's thought. In a silent theoretical move, Girard is in fact echoing his most formidable antipode and mimetic rival par excellence, a philosophical figure whose initial success he helped promote: Jacques Derrida.[22] And this is where yet another, latent, yet foundational, perhaps even original arche-duel in mimetic theory is added to this already densely layered duel.

It is true that Derrida is usually recognized as a thinker of difference and Girard as a thinker of sameness, but this antithetical relation should not blind us to the mimetic undercurrent that ties these two theoretical antagonists. In fact, what Girard calls "the mimetic principle of reciprocity" that both "provokes and suspends the trend to extremes" functions as both the problem and the solution, the poison and the cure—what Derrida, echoing Plato, famously called a *pharmakon*. As Derrida puts it in "Plato's Pharmacy," first published in 1968, the *pharmakon* "acts as both remedy and poison … can be—alternatively or simultaneously—beneficent or maleficent."[23] The *pharmakon* stands for the supplementary logic of *écriture*, but since writing is a practice that reproduces speech, it also stands in for the

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

paradoxical logic of *mimesis*. This is why Derrida says that "*mimēsis* is akin to the *pharmakon:*" "it has no nature; nothing is properly its own. Ambivalent, playing with itself by hollowing itself out, good and evil at once—undecidably, *mimēsis* is akin to the *pharmakon.*"[24] Indeed, animating Derrida's original reading of the pharmakon is the hollow figure of the phantom of mimesis, if only because Plato's pharmacological diagnostic rests on his ambivalence about mimesis. Thus, Derrida specifies: "If the *pharmakon* is 'ambivalent,' it is because it constitutes the medium in which opposites are opposed, the movement and the play that links them among themselves, reverses them or makes one side cross over into the other (soul/body, good/evil, inside/outside, memory/forgetfulness, speech/writing,"[25] and, we may add, model/copy, form/simulacrum, origin/phantom.[26] Girard is often antagonistic to intellectual father figures in mimetic theory such as Plato, Nietzsche, and Derrida. In a romantic move that reveals a fundamental contradiction at the heart of his mimetic hypothesis, Girard often prefers to stress the originality of his own thought. Yet, familiarity with the history of mimesis shows that Girard is one of the most recent and incisive theoretical avatars of a long chain of thinkers who consider mimesis in its double, pharmacological manifestations. This is true of his take on the sacrificial "scapegoat" qua *pharmakos*, but it is still true for his take on mimetic reciprocity qua *pharmakon*, and other rivalrous subjects Girard inherited from this tradition and developed further.[27] In an uncanny echo of Conrad's fiction, these two French intellectual antagonists—both Derrida and Girard are intensely abstract, theoretically ambitious, and care for academic honor—also turn out to be mimetic doubles qua rivals.

With the echoes of this larger theoretical war in the background, the duel is escalating to a higher degree of theoretical intensity. Girard, in fact, implicitly aligns Clausewitz with a classical philosophical tradition that opens up a possible mimetic way out from the cycle of violence by making the poison the possible starting point of the cure itself. To put it in the diagnostic language we have ourselves inherited from this Platonic/Nietzschean tradition, we could specify this claim thus: if mimetic pathos is responsible for the pathological escalation of violence characteristic of abstract war, mimetic *distance* is responsible for the patho-*logical* suspension of the violence of real war. And yet, the distinctiveness of Girard's mimetic thought has always been to downplay the therapeutic side of mimesis and to emphasize its pathological side. Unsurprisingly, then, this tendency is accentuated in a book titled *Battling to the End*. Thus, a few pages below he says that reciprocal action "only suspends it [the escalation to extremes] in

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

order to further accelerate it later" (*BE* 18). Indeed for Girard, violence "always wins" (xvii) in the end. Consequently his pharmacological observation remains at the level of a promising yet abstract and undeveloped hypothesis that requires closer empirical scrutiny to be completed. This is where Conrad, fictional duelist that he is, strikes back to pry open the door that leads to *the end of the battle*.

ENDING THE DUEL: NEUROPLASTICITY CONTRA MIRROR NEURONS

In the final duel, Conrad offers a possible remedy for the problem of mimetic pathology and the violent reflex it entails. We have seen that the previous duels that punctuate the narrative are based on the principle of mimetic reciprocity whereby the adversaries automatically strike back, mindlessly following the unconscious pathos of abstract war. The final duel, on the other hand, marks a sharp turn in Conrad's theorization of mimetic violence, as it is predicated on a strategic *logos* characteristic of real war. This duel, in fact, no longer entails short-range weapons (such as swords, sabers, or horses) but, rather, takes place in a copse where the two duelists qua doubles, armed with pistols, stalk each other to put an end to the duel. A clear shift of emphasis in the dynamic of duel has thus taken place: the proximity of the sword gives way to the distance of the gun; the immediacy of unconscious reactions is replaced by the mediation of conscious actions; single force gives way to strategic plan; *abstract* war to *real* war. It is thus on a firm, realistic ground that Conrad proposes a possible way out from the royal road of violence, opening up a short cut to peace.

In his fictions, Conrad tends to posit the primacy of nature over culture, the darkness of emotions over the light of reason; yet, at the end of "The Duel," the narrative unpredictably turns. And what emerges is a reciprocal, dynamic relation between instinct and culture, conscious, rational actions and unconscious, emotional reactions whose dynamic interplay offers a mimetic way out from the determinism of mirror neurons. In a speculative reflection that will frame his final strategy, D'Hubert ponders: "'He [Feraud] despises my shooting,' he thought, displaying that insight into the mind of his antagonist which is of such great help in winning battles" (252). And in light of this mimetic insight into the mind of his double, D'Hubert privileges the defense over the attack, passivity over activity, precisely to put an end to the battle. This defensive strategy is still in line with Clausewitz's famous realization that "*the defensive form of warfare is intrinsically stronger*

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

than the offensive" (*OW* 160); but this is not only an objective (or exterior) strategic realization. On the contrary, this passage also suggests that D'Hubert relies on a subjective (or interior) insight into the "mind" of the other to foresee what the other thinks and feels. Put differently, thanks to a (mimetic) in-sight into the psychic life of the other, D'Hubert momentarily suspends a direct (mirroring) confrontation with his double, keeps at a safe distance from the irresistible logic of the reciprocal pathos characteristic of abstract war, and starts to think of a possible solution to end the duel. Indeed, mimesis begins to work not only as a contagious poison but also as a possible cure.

And yet, if Conrad agrees with the classical pharmacological thesis that a mimetic identification functions as a possible cure for mimetic reciprocity, he also adds important diagnostic supplements. For instance, he makes us see that D'Hubert's strategy in real war entails a type of *conscious* identification with the other that should not be too hastily conflated with the *unconscious* mimesis characteristic of reciprocal actions in abstract war. If the latter is based on an immediate bodily pathos, the former is based on a reflective mental distance; if the latter entails an unconscious reaction, the former entails a conscious action. Mimesis, for Conrad, has indeed pharmacological qualities; but one should not confuse mimetic *pathos* with mimetic *logos* lest we muddle the distinction between pathology and patho-logy that informs the mimetic unconscious. We should thus specify our diagnostic by saying that it is because D'Hubert already finds himself affected, or if you prefer, infected by Feraud's warlike pathos that he can develop a privileged insight into his "mind" from a distance. An unconscious, mimetic connection, predicated on a mirroring mechanism is, thus, paradoxically, an essential condition for the development of a conscious, mental, yet still mimetic insight into the psychic life of the other. Thus, the poison turns into the remedy, pathology into patho-logy. And it is precisely from this dynamic interplay between body and mind, immediacy and mediation, consciousness and unconsciousness, *pathos* and *logos* that Conrad opens up a theoretical way out from the escalating logic of violence.

At the climax of the last duel the two antagonists confront each other in a "war to the death" (250) we have been tracing all along. But this time, the narrative articulates the complex interplay that ties instinctual actions to mental reactions. Since this is a dramatization of real, not abstract, war, it is important to picture the concrete details of the scene. D'Hubert is waiting for Feraud, lying flat on the ground, in a horizontal position of defense, so as to "draw his fire at the greatest possible range" (251); and thanks to this

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

defensive strategy, he causes his adversary to miss the first of the two shots available. D'Hubert's strategic solution here is not without echoes with the Chinese art of war. That is, the art to plan the battle in advance in such a way that, by exploiting the immanent potential offered by the situation, and by relying on a form of action that is, in fact, a nonaction, the strategist can "subdue the enemy's army without battle."[28] But Conrad also gives this Chinese art a Western twist. A dandy always in possession of his "looking-glass," D'Hubert maximizes his field of vision by relying on a classical, mimetic device that allows him, quite literally, to see double. Thus he literally turns into a Janus-faced figure who sees both ahead and behind: we are told that "holding the little looking-glass just clear of his tree, he squinted into it with his left eye, while the right kept a direct watch on the rear of his position" (253). It seems then, that a conscious, visual representation introduces a rational distance that counters the unconscious immediacy of mimetic contagion; a specular mirror has the power to prevent mirror neurons from firing.

And yet, Conrad immediately complicates this specular scenario that privileges sight over emotion, a conscious mental sense (I see) over an unconscious bodily sense (I feel). In fact, D'Hubert's trick of the mirror (or mimetic representation) does not manage to fully frame, freeze, and contain the logic of instinctual mimesis (or mimetic reflex). As the shadow of his double enters D'Hubert's field of vision, it has the power to trigger his mirror neurons causing them to fire, or better, misfire. Hence, upon seeing "the shadow of his enemy falling aslant on his outstretched legs" (255), the following unconscious reaction naturally ensues: "It was too much even for his coolness. He jumped up thoughtlessly, leaving the pistols on the ground" (255), exposing himself to Feraud's fire. This passage makes clear that, for Conrad, vision and the mimetic reflections it entails cannot freeze instinctual bodily reactions; an unconscious *pathos* is not, and will never be, under the full control of a conscious *logos*. The shadow of mimesis has, once again, fallen upon D'Hubert's ego, turning him into a mimetic double that can easily be finished off.

Now, at the maximum moment of exposure and vulnerability, having dropped his weapons to the ground, D'Hubert, *alias* the Strategist, manages to turn his disadvantage into advantage and, in an acrobatic move, radically inverts the final outcome of this duelist confrontation. Here is the final dramatic scene that puts an end to the duel:

> The irresistible instinct of an average man (unless totally paralyzed by discomfiture) would have been to stoop for his weapons, exposing himself to the risk of being shot

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

> down in that position . . . the fact is that General D'Hubert never attempted to stoop for them. Instead of going back on his mistake, he seized the rough trunk with both hands, and swung himself behind it with such impetuosity that, going right round in the very flash and report of the pistol-shot, he reappeared on the other side of the tree face to face with General Feraud. This last, completely unstrung by such a show of agility on the part of a dead man, was trembling yet. A very faint mist of smoke hung before his face which had an extraordinary aspect, as if the lower jaw had come unhinged. (255–56)

And so, the legendary duel that reflected the Napoleonic Wars and urged us to reflect on the mimetic violence of war, eventually comes to an end. As the antagonist is finally "unhinged," the mirroring logic of violence can no longer swing the duelists back and forth, from violent actions to mimetic reactions. Instead, restraining the "gust of homicidal fury, resuming in its violence the accumulated resentment of a lifetime" (256), D' Hubert holds his fire and forces his disarmed antagonist to "fight no more duels" by dictating his conditions for peace. As true master of the art of war, D'Hubert finishes the duel—without finishing off Feraud.

How did this shortcut to peace open up? What is the remedy that puts an end to a pathological escalation of violence? D'Hubert does not fully know. But at this culminating turning point, Conrad—warlike writer that he is—strategically intervenes, and with a deft narrative move that cuts deep in the mimetic logic of instinctual violence, he shoots this theoretical bullet: "Instinct, of course, is irreflective. It is its very definition" (255), he says. And then he adds: "But *it may be an inquiry worth pursuing whether in reflective mankind the mechanical promptings of instinct are not affected by the customary mode of thought* (255; my emphasis). In this striking oxymoronic passage imbued with affective and logical speculations concerning the relation between instinct and thought, nature and culture, *pathos* and *logos*, Conrad is opening up new patho-*logical* possibilities that not only challenge recent accounts of violence, nor solely complicate the determinism of mirror neurons, but also open up a shortcut to peace on the basis of new mimetic principles. To conclude, let us watch Conrad's bullet in slow motion, so as to flesh out its main implications for mimetic theory.

Conrad's emphasis on the primacy of "reflective mankind" over "irreflective instinct" seems, at first sight, to indicate a rationalist solution to the problem of violence that privileges reason over emotions, logos over pathos. But, on a closer look, Conrad is careful not to fall into the rationalist trap that considers thought stronger than

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

instinct, reason more powerful than emotions. As we have seen, despite the trick of the mirror, the shadow of the mimetic unconscious had triggered D'Hubert's mirror neurons to fire nonetheless, causing an instinctual and thoughtless reaction. That instincts can affect thoughts is well known. Clausewitz, for one, had already called attention to the importance of instinctual habits to make what he calls the "right decision" (68). But Conrad's bullet hits deeper. For him, what is essential is not simply that instincts turn into habits, or that nature forms culture. Rather what is essential is that instincts can be "affected by a customary mode of thought." This is an interesting oxymoronic phrase. It joins a rational activity ("thought") with something of the order of habit, repetition, and thus, of a certain degree unconscious automatism ("customary") to indicate that repeated thoughts can emotionally influence ("affect") certain patterns of behavior that, in turn, become instinctual. This is an interesting theoretical point. Thoughts, for Conrad, have the power to shape instincts in such a profound way that the distinction between emotion and reason, reflex and idea *pathos* and *logos* no longer holds. Instinctual thoughts or rationalized instincts are, for him, the key to making the right decisions at critical moments. Thus he suggests that a repetition, or representation of an "idea," which is the fruit of strategic "thought" sedimented into habit, has the power to "affect," in a nonrational, automatic, and thus unconscious way, instinct itself. An unconscious reaction, thus understood, is shaped by a conscious action; a bodily instinct is inflected by a representational thought—in a psycho-somatic way.

Conrad's diagnostic is pushing mimetic principles beyond dualistic principles, suggesting that when it comes to mimesis, clear-cut structural oppositions between *psyche* and *soma,* reason and unreason, consciousness and unconsciousness, *pathos* and *logos,* nature and culture no longer hold. Instead these structural polarities begin to interact and retroact, in a dynamic spiral that has a mimetic logic of its own. It is not simply rational D'Hubert and instinctual Feraud who are caught in the logic of mimetic pathos. It is also the *logic* of Conrad's own thought on war that urges us to think through this complex mimetic interaction. Let us thus closely read this diagnostic passage to the very end. To put an end to this theoretical duel Conrad shoots a second theoretical bullet:

> In his young days, Armand D'Hubert, the reflecting, promising officer, had emitted the opinion that in warfare one should "never cast back on the lines of a

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

> mistake." *This idea, defended and developed in many discussions, had settled into one of the stock notions of his brain, had become a part of his mental individuality.* (255–56; my emphasis)

Here we see that Conrad's "inquiry" was, indeed, worth pursuing. With such a hypothesis, in fact, Conrad offers a mimetic alternative to Girard's assumption that humans are hardwired to battle to the end. While the royal road of violence is certainly a well-trodden road— especially in the age of global, terroristic wars whereby individuals and nations alike continue to automatically fire at the mere sight of the other firing—for Conrad, it is not the only road. Thus, on the shoulders of Clausewitz, but with an ancient mimetic tradition in mind, Conrad develops the hypothesis that the "brain" is not only driven by mirror neurons. It also has the power to generate "ideas" and "thoughts" that, through a process of repetition, become "customary thoughts," and as he incisively says, can go "so inconceivably deep as to affect the dictates of his instinct" (266). How? By "settl[ing] into one of the stock notions of [our] brain" and "becom[ing] a part of [our] mental individuality" (266). This is no minor hypothesis. It challenges dualistic accounts that split the subject across the mind/brain divide and introduces mimetic continuities between the two competing sides. For Conrad, in fact, custom, through the mediation of thought, has the power to change instinct; the mind has the power to change the brain.

Conrad's inquiry was indeed worth pursuing to the end, if only because it finds an empirical confirmation in the emerging field of neuroplasticity, a field that promises to offer new foundations for mimetic theory. Neuroscientists have in fact shown that, far from being hardwired, the human brain turns out to be plastic, adaptable, and thus mimetic throughout one's life and can be shaped by a variety of external impressions. Bringing together a number of case studies from different areas of neuroplastic investigation, Norman Doidge in *The Brain That Changes Itself* sums up this discovery by saying that "the brain can change its own structure and function through thought and activity," describes how patients with brain damage can create new synaptic circuits in the brain, and concludes by confirming Conrad's hypothesis: namely that "our 'immaterial' thoughts have a physical signature."[29] Doidge does not hesitate to call this realization "one of the most extraordinary discoveries of the twentieth century," and philosophers are currently speculating about the "revolutionary" implications of this discovery.[30] And quite rightly so; if the physical structure of the brain, down to its

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

neuronal, synaptic connections, turns out to be continuously shaped, molded, and impressed by thought, then, the plasticity of the brain opens up a series of transformative possibilities for *becoming other* in the future.

Conrad's fictions are, indeed, truly Janus-faced. If he looks ahead to recent empirical realization in the neurosciences it is because he simultaneously looks back to ancient theoretical foundations in mimetic theory. The so-called neuro turn, in fact, offers an empirical confirmation of an ancient mimetic realization. Namely, that humans are most thoroughly mimetic and are thus shaped by "good" and "bad" impressions. At the origins of mimetic theory, Plato already reminded us that education has the power to give form to a human character (from the Greek *kharassein*, to be stamped or engraved), which in childhood especially but not only, is "best molded and take[s] the impression that one wishes to stamp upon it."[31] This mimetic lesson is, once again, a pharmacological lesson: subjects impressed by "bad" models can be stamped with a violent character type. Such subjects are thus easily subjected to a spiraling escalation of mimetic violence that has the potential to lead to apocalyptic ends. And yet, as Girard usefully reminds us, the term "education" comes from *educatio*, leading out. Conrad's neuroplastic hypothesis takes a step further along this educative path. He suggests that, if trained by "good" models, education has the power to lead us out of duels to the end, offering us exemplary types on which to ground the beginning of peace.

To conclude, let us remember that originally the god Janus looked both ways because he presided both over the beginning and ending of wars, over battles to the end and ends of the battles. This duplicity is particularly visible at the end of "The Duel." Thus, if the fiercely Napoleonic Feraud "*won't* be reconciled" (265), his brain being pathologically hardwired to follow the path of violence, D'Hubert relies on his neuroplasticity to step out of the mindless logic of mimetic reciprocity. Countering Feraud's "stupid ferocity" with intelligent sympathy, he says: "'I had the right to blow his brains out; but as I didn't, we can't let him starve'"; after all, he reflects: "'Don't I owe him the most ecstatic moment of my life?'" (266). Rather than dueling to the end, D'Hubert, the Strategist, puts an end to the duel. And in a grateful attitude toward his warlike antipode he ends up "tak[ing] care of him, secretly, to the end of his days'" (266). At the end of "The Duel," then, the Janus-faced figure we have been tracing turns, and one face takes the place of the other. In the process ferocity is replaced by sympathy, the logic of ressentiment by the logic of compassion, the determinism of mirror

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

neurons by the indeterminism of neuroplasticity, the laws of rivalry by the laws of imitation.

This is a fictional happy ending, to be sure, but by ending "The Duel" Conrad also opens up new theoretical beginnings. His mimetic hypothesis not only looks back to the Girardian lesson that literary fictions, if read closely, foreground new theoretical principles; it also looks through mirror neurons, toward neuroplasticity, to find alternative models of nonviolent behavior for the future. Over time, via education and other formative practices, such models might become customary—at least if we take it upon ourselves not only to *inform* the brains of future generations but also to *form* them and, perhaps, also *transform* them. This plastic transformation is now certainly possible in theory; as for turning mimetic theory into practice, Conrad leaves it up to each one of us.

NOTES

I presented shorter versions of this article at the Joseph Conrad Society UK (Rome, 2013) and at the Colloquium on Violence and Religion (Freising, 2014). I am grateful to fellow Conradians and Girardians for their friendly and constructive feedback, as well as to the generous support of the Swiss National Science Foundation for funding my research at Johns Hopkins University. As for my attempt to think about future, life-affirming, and, hopefully, nonapocalyptic destinations, I owe my inspiration to my children, Kim and Nia. This paper is dedicated to them.

1. René Girard, *Achever Clausewitz: Entretiens avec Benoît Chantre* (Paris: Carnet nord, 2007); and *Battling to the End: Conversations with Benoît Chantre*, trans. Mary Baker (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2010). Henceforth *BE* quoted in the body of the text.
2. Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege* (Bonn, Germany: Dummler, 1973); and *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Henceforth *OW* quoted in the body of the text.
3. Nidesh Lawtoo, *The Phantom of the Ego: Modernism and the Mimetic Unconscious* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), chap. 2.
4. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "The Horror of the West," trans. Nidesh Lawtoo and Hannes Opelz, in *Conrad's* Heart of Darkness *and Contemporary Thought: Revisiting the Horror with Lacoue-Labarthe*, ed. Nidesh Lawtoo (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 111–22.
5. Johnsen outlines an important methodological principle that guides my approach in what follows: "The best way to keep company with Girard is to take up seriously his regard for the greatest writers as antecedents and fellow researchers of human behavior. If we simply "apply" Girard, transcoding Conrad into Girardian terms, we have learned

nothing more than Girard has already accomplished, and we have wasted Conrad." William A. Johnsen, "'To My Readers of America': Conrad's 1914 Preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus," Conradiana* 35, nos. 1–2 (2003): 105–22, 108, 106.

6. Joseph Conrad, "The Duel," in *A Set of Six* (New York: Doubleday, 1924), 165–266.

7. This article is part of a book on Conrad and mimetic theory, titled *Conrad's Secret Shadow: Mimesis, Catastrophe, Theory* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, forthcoming).

8. Joseph Conrad, "Autocracy and War," in *Notes on Life and Letters*, ed. J. H. Stape (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 73.

9. On the historical sources of Conrad's "The Duel," see J. H. Stape, "Conrad's 'The Duel': A Reconsideration," *Conradian* 11, no. 1 (1986): 42–46.

10. For a critic who suggests that Conrad is writing *against* Clausewitz, see Sean Gaston, "Conrad's Asymmetrical Duel: Thoughts for the Times of War and Death,"*Angelaki* 15, no. 2 (2010): 51.

11. Jeffrey Meyers, "The Duel in Fiction," *North Dakota Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (1983): 130.

12. See René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965).

13. René Girard, *La Violence et le sacré* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1990), 19 (my translation).

14. See also Stephen L. Gardner, "René Girard's Apocalyptic Critique of Historical Reason: Limiting Politics to Make Way for Faith," *Contagion* 18 (2011): 1–22.

15. Vittorio Gallese, "The Two Sides of Mimesis: Mimetic Theory, Embodied Simulation, and Social Identification," in *Mimesis and Science: Empirical Research on Imitation and the Mimetic Theory of Culture and Religion*, ed. Scott R. Garrels (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012), 95. For a historically informed overview of the implications of the ongoing dialogue between mimesis and science, see Scott R. Garrels, *Mimesis and Science*, chap. 1.

16. I understand "mimetic patho(-)logy" in the dual sense of mimetic sickness and critical *logos* on mimetic *pathos*. See Lawtoo, *Phantom of the Ego*, 6–8.

17. Joseph Conrad, "The Warrior's Soul," in *Tales of Hearsay* (Teddington, England: Echo Library, 2008), 12.

18. Girard's idea of escalation to extremes predates his reading of Clausewitz. See René Girard, *To Double Business Bound: Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 201, 204, 227.

19. On Clausewitz's emphasis on reality over abstraction, see also Christopher Bassford, *Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 11; and Raymond Aron, *Penser la guerre, Clausewitz*, vols. 1 and 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), esp. vol. 2, part 2, "L'Age Nucléair."

20. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1980), 47.

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

21. As Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan recognized, "unlike Dostoevsky, whose work, even at its most polyphonic, ultimately bows down before the need for the Word, Conrad is already far beyond the consolations of metaphysics." Erdinast-Vulcan, *The Strange Short Fiction of Joseph Conrad: Writing, Culture, and Subjectivity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 16.

22. Girard helped organize the famous 1966 conference at the Humanities Center (Johns Hopkins University), "The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man." This conference introduced structuralism and, above all, Derrida's critique of structuralism, to the U.S. academic scene. See *The Structuralist Controversy*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970).

23. Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 70.

24. Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 139.

25. Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 127.

26. This is a fundamental theoretical insight whose genealogy leads us, via Nietzsche, back to the origins of mimetic theory, in Plato's mimetic thought. See Lawtoo, *Phantom of the Ego*, chap. 1.

27. In "Plato's Pharmacy" Derrida offers the following definition of the *pharmakos*: "The character of the *pharmakos* has been compared to a scapegoat. The *evil* and the *outside*, the expulsion of the evil, its exclusion out of the body (and out of) the city—these are the two major senses of the character of the ritual." Follows a lengthy footnote where Derrida relies on the work of James Frazer, Jane Harrison, and other anthropologists in order to stress the "necessity of bringing together the figures of Oedipus and the *pharmakos*" in a discourse that "is not in a strict sense a psychoanalytical one." Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 130–31n56. In a subsequent note, Derrida makes the link with literature explicit as he says: "In his *Anatomy of Criticism* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), Northrop Frye sees in the figure of the *pharmakos* a permanent archetypal structure in Western literature. The exclusion of the *pharmakos*, who is, says Frye, 'neither innocent nor guilty' (p. 41), is repeated from Aristophanes to Shakespeare." Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 132n59. Indeed, if one is looking for the hidden "origins" of Girard's mimetic theory, one could do worse than pointing to "Plato's Pharmacy" in general and pp. 130–32 in particular. Girard's theory of the scapegoat qua *pharmakos*, his emphasis on a dual literary/anthropological tradition, his reliance on the model of Oedipus, his insistence that his reading of Oedipus is not a psychoanalytical one, the privilege accorded to literary figures from Sophocles to Shakespeare, and so forth are neatly summed up there. On the continuities between deconstruction and mimetic theory, see also Andrew McKenna, *Violence and Difference: Girard, Derrida, and Deconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

28. Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Yuan Shibing (Ware, England: Wordsworth Editions, 1998), 25. For an account that contrasts the efficacy of Chinese art of war to Western thought in general and Clausewitz in particular, see François Jullien, *Traité de l'efficacité* (Paris: Grasset, 1996), 24–36.

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.

29. Norman Doidge, *The Brain That Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumphs from the Frontiers of Brain Sciences* (London: Penguin, 2007), xv, 214.

30. Doidge, *The Brain that Changes Itself*, xv. For an account of the philosophical implications of neuroplasticity, see also Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain*? trans. Sebastian Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

31. Plato, *Republic*, trans. Paul Shorey, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, eds. E. Hamilton and H. Cairns (New York: Bollingen Series, 1963), 624. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, on the shoulders of Plato and Derrida, speaks incisively of the mimetic subject in terms of a "pure and disquieting plasticity . . . which doubtless requires a 'subjective base'—a 'wax'—but without any other property than an infinite malleability." Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, ed. Christopher Fynsk (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 115.

This work originally appeared in Contagion, 22, Spring 2015, published by Michigan State University Press.